

## The Handy-Dandy Field Site History: Fifty Years of Field Operations, 1945-1995

THOMAS R. JOHNSON

August 1995 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. It also marks the beginning of modern cryptologic field site operations. Now is a convenient time to look back on fifty years of postwar geographic dispersal.

When World War II came to an end, Army and Navy cryptologists were spread out across the globe in small, mobile organizations supporting fighting forces. They had a few fixed sites, most of them in the United States, but the great bulk of their resources was in the mobile units.

Most of them went back to civilian life, and by 1947 the Army and Navy had only a small residue of mobile teams. They relied instead on [redacted] fixed sites - [redacted]. When the Air Force cryptologic organization, USAF Security Service, was created in 1948, it inherited three mobile Army Security Agency units but no fixed field sites. This is how the cryptologic business looked when, in 1948, the "Cold War" broke out.

When the Armed Forces Security Agency (the first American attempt at centralized cryptologic management) was formed in 1949, one of the first orders of business was to write a master plan for the expansion of field sites. This task was spurred by the outbreak of war in Korea the following year, and the early 1950s were characterized by the almost breathtaking expansion of SIGINT field sites. By the end of the Korean War, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had endorsed a plan establishing the final level of collection positions at some 3,000 (a level which was never achieved, incidentally). The numbers of field sites mounted yearly: [redacted]. If you worked as a cryptologist, your bags were packed, and you were ready to go.

The "era of expansion" (1948 through 1957; see chart 1) had several unique characteristics:

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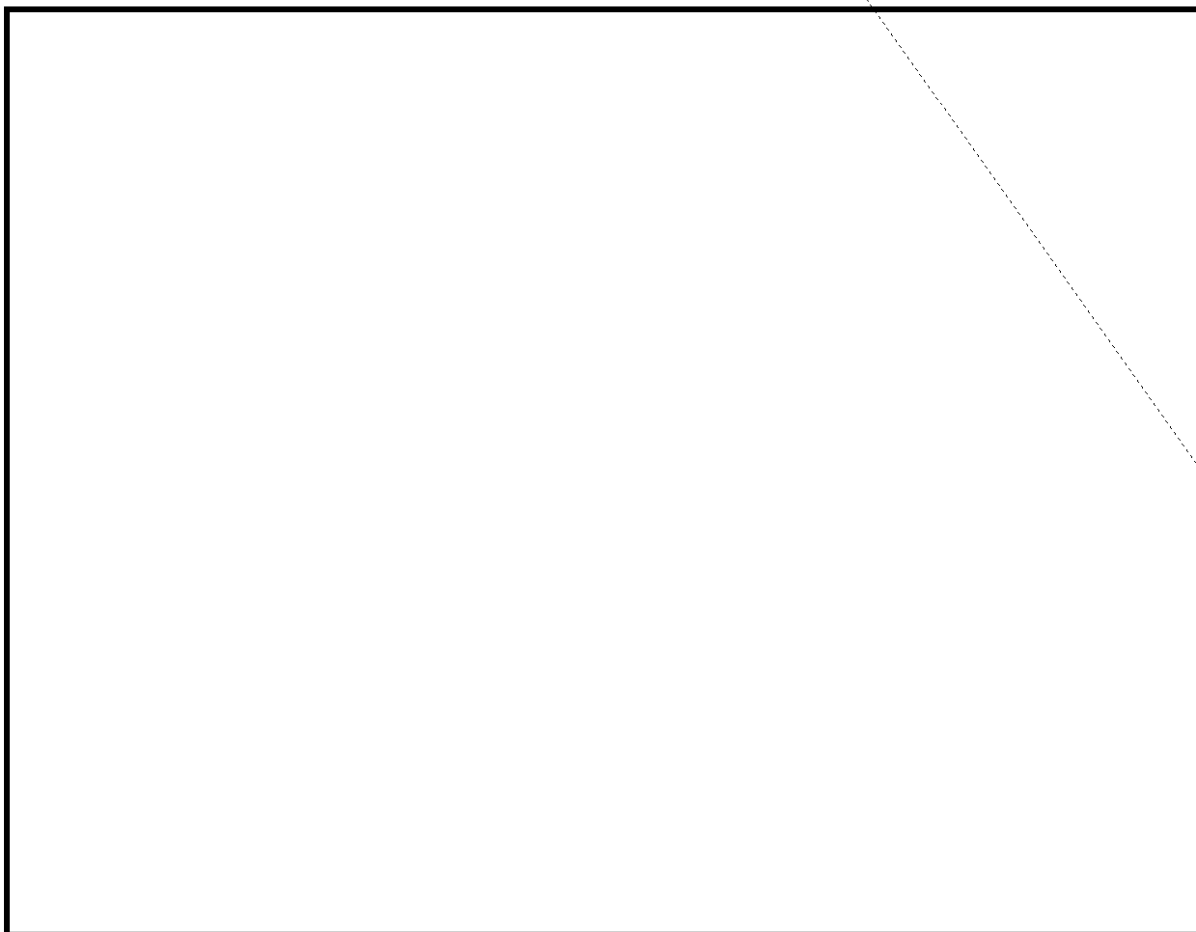
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Chart 1

Fixed Field Sites: 1846 - 1894



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1. This was the "Golden Age of HF." The principal targets communicated mainly in high frequency communications, although above HF was gradually coming into use.

2. The primary target was the Soviet Union. Others (Communist China, North Korea, the Third World) were ancillary. American foreign policy and SIGINT dispersal were for the purpose of containing Communist expansion.

The heady expansion years of the first decade peaked in the late Eisenhower administration. The austere military budgets of 1958-1960 resulted in a small decline in the number of field sites, but the conflict in Southeast Asia brought this to an end. Site consolidations

ordered by a series of committees from 1958 through 1965, did not lead to an overall reduction in field site resources. The extra resources were simply transferred to Southeast Asia to support the Vietnam conflict.

As American troops left Southeast Asia beginning in 1969, the SIGINT business began a period of decline which was reflected both at home and abroad. The withdrawal from Vietnam was accompanied by the loss of geographic access

This trend ultimately led to the loss of sites in Thailand, and Ethiopia. The field site posture entered a slalom slope which bottomed out in 1981, the year Ronald Reagan took office. It was due to the residual effects of the Vietnam drawdown and the contraction of the intelligence community following Watergate and the Church and Pike Committee hearings of 1975.

Renewed competition with the Soviet Union, reflected in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, stopped this trend cold. The invasion, and the Iranian hostage crisis, forced President Jimmy Carter to focus increasingly on national security issues, and Reagan continued and accelerated the buildup of defense resources.

The Reagan buildup did not lead to an overall increase in SIGINT field sites. The number stayed virtually stationary, even while the budgetary increases brought increasing sophistication to the field sites. It was the same set of field sites with more expensive toys. Overhead and COMSAT collection were high-ticket items, and the sites that had collection assets in those areas underwent expansion. Classical HF sites did not grow.

The end of the Cold War, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the breakup of the Soviet Union following the 1991 coup, resulted in further retrenchment, and the number of field sites today is the smallest since the Korean War. The decline has been the most severe in the Army

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[redacted] but it has also been reflected in Navy and Air Force resources. [redacted] and the field site system as cryptologists came to know it has become a thing of the past.

Chart Two tracks the field sites from 1945 through 1994. They are organized by service, with Army first, then Navy, then Air Force, and finally units which do not fit neatly into any of the three "service" categories. (NSA field sites are in this group.) Within service, the units are listed by SIGINT Address (Sigad) in ascending order. Each Sigad is followed by a location, but locations are not necessarily grouped together. For instance, the Army site in [redacted] Thus the same field site is listed in two different locations on the chart.

This recap of cryptologic field sites since 1945 is a follow-on to an article published in *Cryptolog* for January-February 1977 by Frederick O. Mason. It traces the ebb and flow of U.S. field sites since World War II, based on (it is hoped) more complete information, updated through 1994. (Mr. Mason's time period ended in 1976.) It is based on different criteria, however. Specifically, it includes only those sites that were assigned a COMINT mission (or, since 1958, an ELINT mission) and steers clear of headquarters-only sites (those that had only an administrative function, as opposed to collection, processing, and reporting). Cryptologic Support Group and NSA/CSS Representative locations also do not appear. [redacted] COMSEC-only sites have not been included, and purely tactical organizations have also been placed outside the sphere. (However, precisely what constitutes a "tactical" unit versus a "fixed site" has been rather murky at times, especially in the early years. And in war zones like Korea and Vietnam, everything could be, but was not, considered "tactical.") Beginning and end dates for units depend on complex factors, and the mists of time have obscured, in many cases, information about when a unit actually began or ended its operational mission (as opposed to orderly room functions). No two cryptologic veterans would ever agree on a final listing, and each would be able to produce evidence substantiating his or her case.

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Army Sites

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| USM-83 St. Lawrence Is., AI.  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 56-57                |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| USM-604 Pleiku/Nha Trang, RVN |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 66-72                |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| USM-626 Saigon, RVN           |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 61-73                |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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Army Sites

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| Army Sites                                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| USM-808 Da Nang, RVN<br>Phu Bai, RVN            |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 62 [REDACTED] 72 [REDACTED]<br>63-71 [REDACTED] |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Navy Sites                                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| USN-13 Adak, Al. 45-94 [REDACTED]               |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| USN-14 Wahiawa, Hi. 47-94 [REDACTED]            |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| USN-18 Dupont, S.C. [REDACTED] 45-54 [REDACTED] |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| USN-21 Skaggs Is., Ca. 49-55 [REDACTED]         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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|   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 2 3 4   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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|  |       | Navy Sites |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
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| USN-22 Cheltenham, Md.                   | 45-70 |            |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
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| USN-26 San Fran., Ca.<br>Skaggs Is., Ca. | 45-55 | 56-93      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| USN-28 Northeast Cape, Al.               | 55-57 |            |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| USN-39 Yokosuka, Jpn.                    | 48    |            |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
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| YEAR                                     | 1946  | 1947       | 1948 | 1949 | 1950 | 1951 | 1952 | 1953 | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 | 1957 | 1958 | 1959 | 1960 | 1961 | 1962 | 1963 | 1964 | 1965 | 1966 | 1967 | 1968 | 1969 | 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 |

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Navy Sites

|                           |                  |                            |                            |                            |                            |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| USN-414J Da Nang, RVN     | (54-70)          | (65-71)                    |                            |                            |                            |
| USN-416 Marietta, Wn.     |                  |                            |                            |                            |                            |
| USN-418 Dupont, S.C.      | (56)             |                            |                            |                            |                            |
| USN-410 Northwest, Va.    | (57)             |                            |                            |                            |                            |
|                           |                  |                            |                            |                            |                            |
| USN-426 Cape Chiniak, Al. | (54-57)          |                            |                            |                            |                            |
|                           |                  |                            |                            |                            |                            |
| USN-837 Northwest, Va.    |                  | (67-94)                    |                            |                            |                            |
| USN-837J Key West, Fl.    |                  |                            | (76)                       |                            |                            |
| YEAR                      | 19 6 7 8 9<br>45 | 19 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9<br>50 | 19 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9<br>60 | 19 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9<br>70 | 19 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9<br>80 |
|                           |                  |                            |                            |                            | 19 1 2 3 4<br>90           |

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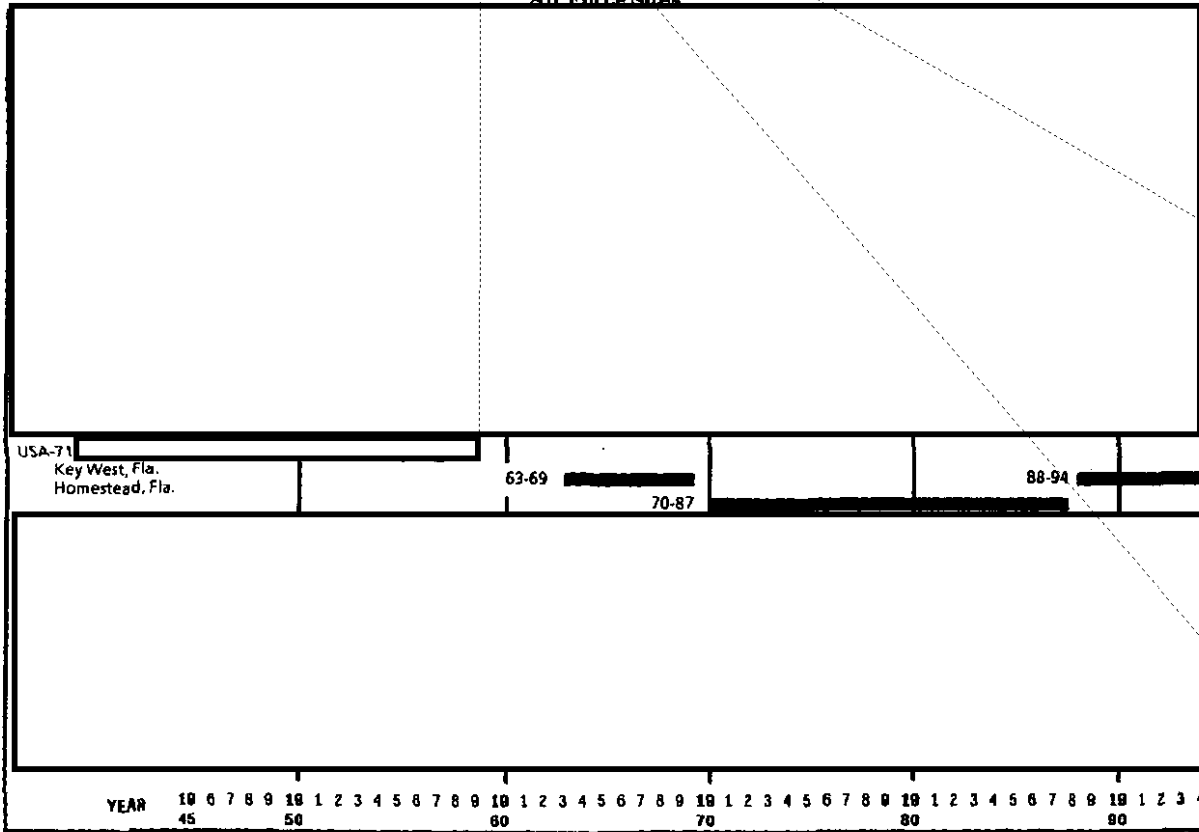
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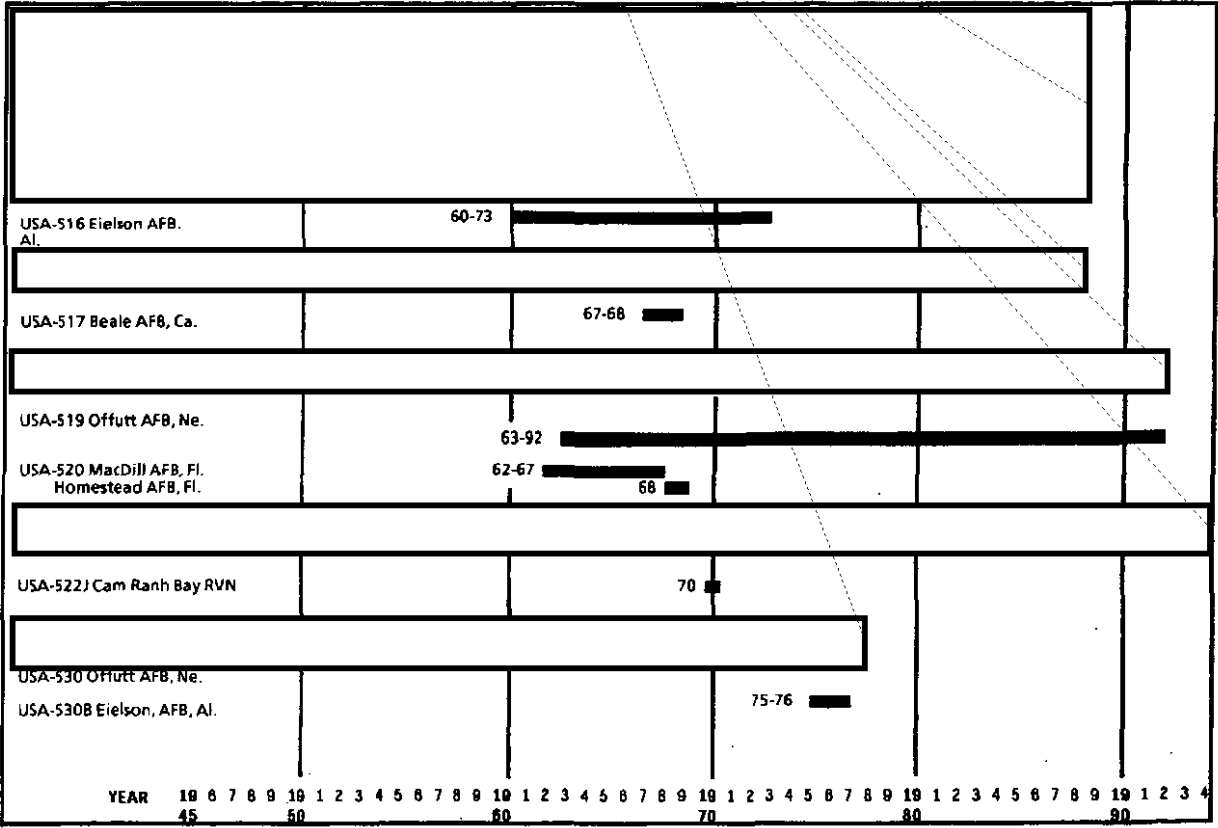
Air Force Sites



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Air Force Sites



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**Joint and Combined Units**

| Joint and Combined Units                |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |       |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |       |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| USF-790 Rosman, N.C.                    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |       |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 81-94 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| USF-796 Asmara<br>(Stonehouse) Ethiopia |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 70-75 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |       |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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